

NSC BRIEFING

25 March 1959

TIBET

I. A series of anti-Communist demonstrations beginning on 10 March in the Tibetan capital of Lhasa (population 80,000) has presented Peiping with its most serious security problem since it occupied the area in 1951.

A. Fear that the Chinese were planning to kidnap the Dalai Lama apparently touched off the revolt.

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B. Although Peiping attempted to deal leniently with the rebels through propaganda, fighting intensified on 20 March and continued for several days. On 24th (Tuesday) dissidents "retreated" from Lhasa which apparently is quiet.

II. The Tibetan unrest represents no real threat to Peiping's control. The Communists have so far been reluctant to use drastic measures for fear of offending India.

- A. Chicomz have 64,000 troops in Tibet proper--most of them in Lhasa area--and are moving in new personnel and equipment.**
- 1. Tibet proper (about twice the size of Texas) has population of 1½ million. Of these about ½ million are Khambas--with a long tradition of dissidence against Chinese authority.**
 - 2. At least two million Tibetans live in areas surrounding Tibet and give Dalai Lama spiritual allegiance.**
 - 3. Tibet had outdated army of 10,000 when Chicomz took over.**
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III. On Taiwan, Chiang Kai-shek says the uprisings compel him to take positive action to help.

- A. Believes could best give aid in form of airdrops with planes based on Taiwan, but has stated publicly he would join forces on mainland if Tibetans stand firm.**
- B. Chiang drew sharp contrast between Western reaction to Tibetan and Hungarian uprisings.**

IV. Nehru's government greatly worried over situation in Tibet, fearing consequences will seriously jeopardize Sino-Indian relations.

- A. New Delhi apprehensive over possibility of serious Sino-Indian clashes in event Chinese troops pursue fleeing rebels into Indian or Bhutanese territory.**
- B. Nehru on 23 March publicly declared hands-off policy re Tibetan revolt.**
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2. New Delhi has pointedly reversed its policy of playing down rebel reports by issuing official statements confirming resistance activity.

V. The Dalai Lama fled southeast from Lhasa on 17 March to seek asylum in India.

A. Dalai Lama's presence in India or protectorate Bhutan, representing virtual Tibetan government-in-exile, would be highly embarrassing to New Delhi, but Nehru probably would not refuse to grant some kind of asylum.

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